



30 DAYS IN

[COLOSSIANS]



Supported by
The Methodist Church 

Introduction to Bible Month

What is 'Bible Month'?

Bible Month invites churches and groups to engage deeply with Scripture through focusing on a single biblical book over a calendar month. Bible Month can involve preachers, small group leaders, and children and youth workers, who can all take part in running Bible Month within the church. The Bible Month resources are designed to work within both group settings – such as a church, a group of churches or a home group – and to be useful for individual study.

Focusing on a single biblical book allows participants to gain a greater sense of the importance of context, both literary and historical. It encourages readers to explore how a book develops, and to identify links between different passages. As well as enjoying favourite passages within one book, Bible Month encourages readers to engage with the whole of it.

With roots in the Methodist Church, Bible Month is now run as a partnership with the Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust (LWPT). Further information and resources on Bible Month are available at www.preachweb.org/biblemonth.

Resourcing Bible Month

In 2019, Bible Month focuses on Colossians, a letter that presents a powerful vision of Jesus and his significance. The primary resource for the Bible Month planning group is this Bible Month magazine **which contains three key sections**.

The first section is the **Bible Notes**, which offer a basic commentary on Colossians and are designed to help preachers engage with the book and prepare sermons on it. The biblical scholar Emeritus Professor James D. G. Dunn has written the Bible Notes for 2019. Professor Dunn has published prolifically on the apostle Paul including writing the books *'The Theology of Paul the Apostle'* and *'The Acts of the Apostles'*. He is also a Methodist local preacher.

At the end of each week's Bible Notes is the second section, the **Small Group Studies**. These showcase different ways to engage with Colossians, and can be used in a small group gathering that follows or precedes the Sunday sermon. Rather than providing a detailed outline, these provide ideas that can be incorporated within a small group.

The third section is a variety of ideas for **helping children and youth** engage with Colossians, including mixed-age gatherings. These ideas can be adapted for use in Sunday schools, youth groups and Sunday services.

The final pages of the magazine also include gospel readings for Bible Month, further resources and suggested ways to follow up Bible Month within your church.

Please note that you can adapt and use the material in whatever way works best! The aim of Bible Month is to encourage and enable people to enjoy one biblical book in much greater depth. This resource is intended as a springboard for deeper understanding of Scripture.

Training events for Bible Months are regularly held across the country, and you can see a list of events – as well as a guide for running your own event – at www.preachweb.org/biblemonth.

Planning Bible Month

Groups and individuals wishing to engage in Bible Month can **register** at www.preachweb.org/biblemonth to receive regular updates and information to resource their Bible Month.

The following gives a series of suggested steps for running Bible Month:

- ensure that the leadership of your church and/or circuit is happy to run Bible Month
- decide on the date for Bible Month (while many churches have run Bible Month in June, you can choose any month within the year that will work for

you as a church or group of churches; for example Methodists will need to make sure that they plan ahead sufficiently so that Bible Month can appear in the Circuit Preaching Plan)

- check the Bible Month website (www.preachweb.org/biblemonth) for further resources and ideas for running Bible Month, and also to sign up for training events in your region
- form a Bible Month Planning Group (to liaise with the leadership of the church to identify preachers, small group leaders, and children and youth leaders who can take the lead on Bible Month in their areas of the church)
- run Bible Month!
- following Bible Month, meet together as a planning group to discuss what went well and what could be improved. Explore ways you could follow up Bible Month.

While we suggest engaging the whole church in Bible Month, feel free to adapt Bible Month in whatever way works best in your context.



For further information about the Bible Month, visit www.preachweb.org/biblemonth.

Introduction to Colossians

Professor James D. G. Dunn

The Church at Colossae

It is quite hard to get a clear picture of Christianity's beginnings in Colossae, not least because Colossae is mentioned only once in the NT – in Col. 1:2. So we do not know if Paul himself ever visited Colossae, though in his journeys through the southern part of Asia (western Turkey) recorded in Acts 18:23 and 19:1 he must have been not very far away – Colossae lying on or close to one of the main east-west routes through the region, through the Lycus valley. Alternatively, it is easy to imagine that during his two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:10) he himself or mission teams from Ephesus spread the gospel further inland. This is one of the likely explanations of the growth of the churches written to in Rev. 2-3, though (somewhat surprisingly?) the church in Colossae is not mentioned in Rev. 2-3.

The church in Colossae was founded probably in the second half of the 50s CE and probably by Epaphras (Col. 1:6-7), who was himself a native of Colossae (4:12). He could have been converted by Paul during the latter's time in Ephesus. The parallels between Col. 4:9-14 and Philemon 23-24 strongly suggest that Philemon also lived in Colossae, and that the two letters were written about the same time.

We know that Colossae was almost destroyed by an earthquake in 60 or 61. And the lack of any reference to the earthquake strongly suggests a letter written prior to that. Since the letter was written from prison or house arrest (4:10) the suggestion that the letter was written early in the period of Paul's house arrest in Rome (60-62) makes best sense.

Paul and the Colossians

The letter introduces itself as written by Paul (1:1). The style, however, seems to be rather different from that of the undisputed Pauline letters. That may not be a decisive consideration since Paul may well have used an amanuensis, that is, someone to write at his dictation. Timothy appears as a co-author (1:1), as in some of Paul's other letters (e.g. 2 Corinthians, Philippians and Philemon), but

it is certainly possible to envisage Paul the prisoner (4:10) passing more responsibility to Timothy in this case. The parting greeting in 4:18 'in my own hand' may well confirm the suggestion.

This may well help to explain some of the distinctive features of the letter – notably the Christology (*what Paul teaches about Christ*) (1:15-20), the 'realized eschatology' (*the idea the future hope expected at the end of history is now a reality.*) of 2:11-12 and 3:1, and the 'household rules' of 3:18-4:1 – though we can hardly doubt that Paul continued to develop his own understanding and expression of the gospel throughout his ministry.

Colossians gives one of the clearest indications of a church composed of Jews and Gentiles. From various historical references we know that there were substantial Jewish communities in the Lycus valley. And several passages in Colossians strongly suggest that the recipients were predominantly Gentiles who – through the gospel – had been given to share in privileges previously only known to Jews, the people of Israel – 1:12, 27; 2:13; 3:11; 4:11.

Why Colossians?

Why should Paul write or authorize a letter to a fairly minor church which he had never visited? The implication of 1.7-8 is that news had come from Epaphras which occasioned some anxiety. If Onesimus (4:9) was the slave of Philemon (Phlm. 10-16), then he too could have brought news from Colossae. The references to Tychicus and Mark (Col. 4:7-10) also suggest a concern to maintain communication with the Colossian believers. And the warnings in 2:8-23 certainly signal an anxiety for their spiritual wellbeing. So what was the problem or danger envisaged? The implication of 2:8-23 is that the practitioners of an older established 'philosophy' had contrasted the 'captivating' power of their own beliefs and practice with those of the Colossian believers (2:8), and had 'passed (negative) judgment' on the latter's rituals and festivals (2:16). They had acted as though they themselves were umpires with the authority (of ancient tradition) to 'disqualify' the Christian

belief and practice (2:18) as ineffectual and unfit for purpose.

What was this 'philosophy'? The emphasis on 'wisdom' (1:9, 28; 2:3, 23), 'insight' (1:9; 2:2), and 'knowledge' (1:9-10; 2:2-3) suggests a form of Gnosticism which emphasized the importance of *gnosis* ('knowledge'). The reference to 'the elements of the universe' and the cosmic powers (2:8, 15) likewise suggest a belief that only by establishing a right relationship with such powers could one hope to participate in the divine 'fullness' (2:9-10) – language typical of later Gnostic systems which were Christianity's principal challengers in the first few centuries.

There was probably a Jewish element in the mix. Jewish thinkers did not hesitate to commend Judaism as a 'philosophy'. And talk of 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' was widespread in Second Temple Judaism as well. The somewhat puzzling 'worship of angels' (2:18) can be readily understood as worship offered by angels, rather than worship offered to angels, which would fit well with one of the great traditions of Jewish visionary apocalypses, as also in the Revelation of John. The repeated reference to circumcision (2:11, 13; 3:11; 4:11) and the reference to 'matters of food and drink', 'festivals, new moons and sabbaths' (2:16) also suggest that the challenge to the recently established Christian church in Colossae came more from local Jewish synagogues.

So Colossians gives us a unique insight into the religious mix of Asia Minor in the second half of the first century. And also into some of the challenges which the first Christian churches experienced as they sought to establish themselves in such contexts. Particularly striking is the theological vision of Christ and of his significance – active in creation (1:15-20), the fullness of deity indwelling him (2:9), the scope of his accomplishments on the cross (2:11-15), dying and living with Christ (3:1-10).

Whether the church in Colossae did survive may be uncertain, but the letter they presumably circulated to other churches is a legacy from which we still benefit.

Overview

Week One

1:1-8: Greeting and Thanksgiving

1:9-13: Opening Prayer

1:15-20: The Christ Hymn

1:21-23: Reconciliation and Response

Week Two

1:24-25: A Personal Statement

1:24-29: Paul and the Gospel

2:1-5: Paul and the Colossians

2:6-4:6: The Letter Theme

2:6-7: Thematic Statement

2:8-23: The Cross and Human Tradition

2:8-15: *The Power of the Cross*

Week Three

2:16-19: *Free from Condemnation*

2:20-23: *Free in Christ*

3:1-4:6: A New Pattern Of Life

3:1-4: Life with Christ

3:5-17: Living the New Life

Week Four

3:18-4:1: Household Rules

4:2-6: Concluding Exhortations

4:7-18: Conclusion

4:7-9: Maintaining Communication

4:10-17: Greetings

4:18: A Personal Greeting

Week 1

Colossians 1:1-23



Professor James D. G. Dunn

Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-8)

The letter begins in accordance with the conventions of the time to indicate the author(s) of the letter – Paul, as usual strongly affirming his apostleship, and his ‘brother’ or colleague, Timothy (1:1). Likewise with the indication of to whom the letter is addressed in Colossae, warmly greeted as ‘saints’ and ‘faithful brothers in Christ’ – ‘in Christ’ being one of Paul’s distinguishing phrases (1:2). Characteristically too, Paul replaces the normal greeting, *chairein* (‘hail’), with the more distinctive Christian *charis* (‘grace’), to which he adds the usual Jewish greeting, *shalom*, ‘peace’.

Typically the opening words are followed by an expression of thanksgiving and prayer, both elaborated (1:3-11; cf. e.g. Phil. 1:3-11; Phm. 4-6). The warmth of the relationship is striking, especially so if Paul had himself never visited Colossae – Paul, always praying for them, thrilled by what he had heard of their faith in Christ and their love ‘for all the saints’, and by the hope they all shared (1:3-5a).

PREACHING POINTS

Have we lost something important in the often very casual greetings in the letters we send to family or friends?

Paul recalls how the gospel came to them, using the vigorous imagery of a plant bearing fruit among them – they being the fruit of the gospel, as elsewhere, indeed, ‘in all the world’, a remarkable expression of confidence in a very young movement (1:5b-6). ‘Gospel’ was almost always used in the plural (‘good tidings’), particularly in what we might justly call propaganda on behalf of Caesar. So in effect, Paul and the first Christians baptized the word into

Christian vocabulary, and in the singular – *the* good news is of Jesus.

Opening Prayer (1:9-14)

The prayer focuses in very Jewish terms on ‘knowledge of God’s will’, with all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives (1:9). Again the imagery used is very Jewish, the conduct of ‘walking’ (*halak*, from the Jewish technical term *halakhah*, denoting every day interpretation of the law). The test of this conduct will be what it produces. ‘Good works’ are no substitute for faith, but they should be the product of faith (1:10).

Such fruitful living is wholly dependent on divine enabling, a strength which comes from God’s ‘glorious might’. Which does not mean that believers will escape suffering, but it does mean that they will be able to ‘endure everything with patience’, and even with joy (1:11). The sentence continues without a break: such joy, even in suffering, will express itself in thanks to the Father, thanks at the amazing fact that God has ‘qualified’ them to share in the inheritance which had previously been thought to be exclusively Israel’s, often described as ‘children of the light’ (1:12).

PREACHING POINTS

How important is it that we should pray for one another?

The prayer continues with a strong note of what is sometimes described as ‘realized eschatology’, that is the thought that what had hitherto been understood as the hope reserved for the end of history is now already a reality. The Colossian believers had already been rescued from powers which

had previously controlled them – that could include negative desires and selfish habits – and could be counted already as members of God’s kingdom, here unusually referred to as ‘the kingdom of his beloved Son’ (1:13). A final clause reminds readers that they enjoy the blessing of redemption and forgiveness ‘in him’ (1:14).

The Christ Hymn (1:15-20)

Whether this powerful poetic description of Christ should be regarded as a hymn is open to question. But the assertions it makes of Christ go well beyond typical descriptions of and assertions about Jesus. It is amazing to realize that Jesus was already being spoken about in these ways within the first Christian generation.

Think about it! The unknown/invisible God had made Godself known through creation. ‘Made in the image of God’ was a familiar Jewish thought for humankind generally. But the hymn applies the thought specifically to Christ, hailing him as ‘the firstborn of all creation’ (1:15). All things, without exception, were created ‘in him’, ‘through him’ and ‘for him’ (1:16). He pre-exists all things and it is through him that the universe holds together (1:17).

How to explain such language? The key is to recognize that the hymn uses imagery which in Jewish thought related to (divine) Wisdom and Word. These were ways in which Jewish thought could speak about divine activity without speaking of God as such. Good examples are Proverbs 8 and Ecclesiasticus 24. God’s activity in the world could be described without speaking in too human terms of God. The language of the hymn anticipates the great theological breakthrough in the prologue to John’s Gospel (John 1:1-18).



The second verse of the hymn moves on to Christ's present role. He is 'head of the body, the church' – here again the language moves well beyond the usual thought of the individual assembly as 'the church in Y'. He is the beginning of a new reality, the 'firstborn from the dead' – his resurrection assuring all believers that they belong to the same family (Col. 1:18).

And then the astonishing assertion: that 'in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' (1:19). This goes beyond the language used of Wisdom and Word. It asserts that the completeness of God's self-revelation was focused in Christ, that the wholeness of God's interaction with the universe is summed up in Christ. And the goal was not assertion of omnipotence, but reconciliation, to make peace with a rebellious and fallen creation through the sacrifice of the same Christ on the cross (1:20).

PREACHING POINTS

Does the hymn in praise of Christ tell us something about Christ which we don't usually make much of, or is it 'over the top'?

Reconciliation and Response (1:21-23)

The recipients of the letter knew well what the hymn celebrated, for they had been alienated from God, hostile in attitude and acting in wicked ways, the latter presumably to be understood as the result of the former (1:21). 'But now' – the redemptive 'but' – 'reconciled' – such a wonderful term. Never to be forgotten is that the reconciliation came about through Christ's death, a death which wonderfully wiped the slate clean, so that they might be presented to God.

The imagery is drawn from Israel's sacrificial cult: 'holy', that is, set apart to God; 'blameless', a word regularly used of the physical perfection required of the sacrificial animal; 'irreproachable', a term less common in Jewish tradition, but denoting one who is free of accusation or charge (1:22). Implicit is the theology of sacrifice: that the sin of the blameworthy person is exchanged for the sinlessness of the sacrificial victim, here, of course, Christ.

The confidence in the effectiveness of God's provision is qualified by a matching

emphasis on human responsibility. Final acceptance is dependent on remaining 'steadfast in the faith'. Complete salvation is dependent not only on an initial commitment, but on remaining 'steadfast' and not drifting away before the gospel hope has been fully realized (1:23). This is the gospel to which Paul was committed.

PREACHING POINTS

Should we make more of the 'provided that' in 1:23?

Small Group Resource

Week 1 (Colossians 1:1-23)

Getting the Big Picture

Following a greeting and thanksgiving (1:1-8) and opening prayer (1:9-14), this first section of Colossians includes Paul's famous 'Christ hymn' (1:15-20) as well as a short paragraph on the way in which God's reconciling work invites believers to stand 'steadfast in the faith' (1:21-23).

The first session would be an ideal opportunity to explore together the 'big picture' of the letter of Colossians. This will involve scanning through the letter as a whole, or dividing up into smaller groups to scan different sections of the letter. As members of the group read through the letter, encourage them to look out for key features, including information about Paul and the readers, key themes, and key sections. You can then explore how the major sections of the letter link to Colossians 1:1-23.

For this study, it would be helpful to use Bibles without section headings, or you could also provide a print out of Colossians by copying it and pasting it into a Word Document. Online Bible resources (such as www.biblegateway.com) provide easy access to a range of translations.

Approaching the text

Invite members of the group to read silently through Colossians. Alternatively, divide the group into four sub-groups, and ask each group to read through a different section (1:1-23; 1:24 – 2:15; 2:16 – 3:17; 3:18 – 4:18).

Ask members of the group to jot down their thoughts on the following features of Colossians, or one of its sections: What do we find out about Paul? What do we find out about the intended readers of the letter? What are the major divisions within the letter or the section? What are the key themes?

Draw together the observations from members of the group. You could do this by using flip-chart paper, using one sheet for each of the major areas of discussion: Paul, Readers, Divisions, Themes. Go through each of the sections of the chapter, and ask individuals or the groups to call out what they've noticed.

Discuss the opening section of the letter (1:1-23). How do the themes that Paul mentions relate to the book as a whole?

Further Reading

For a helpful discussion of the context of the letter and the details to look for, see Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 74 – 92.



Week 2

Colossians 1:24-2:15



Professor James D. G. Dunn

A PERSONAL STATEMENT (1:24 – 2:5)

Paul and the Gospel (1:24-29)

A characteristic theme in Paul is his rejoicing in suffering (e.g. Rom. 5:3; 8:18; 2 Cor. 7:4). It was not that he rejoiced in the thought of personal martyrdom; rather that he accepted, indeed welcomed, suffering on behalf of those to whom he wrote – presumably because the suffering was an unavoidable consequence of his ministry. He lists such sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:23-28.

Paul's theology of suffering was richer still. Suffering meant suffering with Christ, sharing in Christ's sufferings (cf. e.g. Phil. 3:10-11). This thought of identification with Christ, expressed in his regular use of the phrases 'in Christ' and 'with Christ', was central to Paul's understanding of the gospel. What is special here is the further thought that Paul's own suffering on behalf of his churches somehow completed the saving effect of Christ's death and resurrection (1:24).

PREACHING POINTS

How helpful do you find Paul's theology of suffering?

Paul insisted at the letter's beginning on his apostleship. But here he does not hesitate to describe himself as a servant of the church, as he had already described himself as a servant of the gospel (1:23). His commission is 'to make the word of God fully known' – the 'word of God' even richer than the gospel (1:25). It is further defined as 'the mystery hidden throughout the ages ... but now revealed to his saints' – the gospel as the climax of God's purposes from the beginning (1:26).

And what is this 'mystery'? Nothing other than what had been revealed to Paul in his conversion: that God had always intended to include at the last Gentiles together with Jews as his people. This was the key both to understanding history and to Paul's own mission, as he explains more fully in Rom. 11:25-26; see also Eph. 2:11-22. The working out of this mystery is summed up as 'Christ in you, the (sure) hope of glory' (1:27).

The passage closes with Paul's testimony as to his own vocation, his goal – what can be more profound and challenging than 'to present everyone mature in Christ'? – and the source of his 'energy' powerfully inspired by Christ (1:28-29).

Paul and the Colossians (2:1-5)

Paul's depth of concern for the churches for which he felt responsible must have been well known. The ups and downs of his relationship with the church in Corinth in particular would probably have been to some extent familiar to the churches of the Lycus valley. So, in case it was thought that Paul was only concerned for those churches which he had personally founded, it was evidently important to make it clear that he was equally concerned for those churches formed by members of his team, churches which had never met Paul personally (2:1).

His prayer for them focuses not on practice or belief. Paul's desire is for their fuller (assured) understanding and appreciation of Christ and of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge revealed in him (2:2-3). Then comes the first indication that Paul is concerned about them, explaining why he is writing in the first place. There is a danger that they may be deceived by plausible but mistaken arguments (2:4), which will become clearer as the letter proceeds.

In contrast, Paul hastens to express his confidence in the firmness of their faith in Christ (2:5).

PREACHING POINTS

How do you think Paul would address your church? What concerns/advice/rebuke might you expect him to focus on?

THE LETTER THEME (2:6 – 4:6)

Thematic Statement (2:6-7)

Note the integration of faith and practice. Initial commitment is just that – initial. They had received (the traditions about) Christ as Lord. But that was hardly the whole story. They needed to 'walk in him', that is conduct their lives as motivated and inspired by him (2:6). These traditions provided a 'root' from which they should grow, a 'foundation' on which they should build, and a 'guarantee' for their faith (2:7).

PREACHING POINTS

How should a faith 'abounding in thanksgiving' (2:7) best express itself?

THE CROSS AND HUMAN TRADITION (2:8-23)

The Power of the Cross (2:8-15)

For the first time a specific danger is referred to. There were some seeking to win over the recipients of his letter to what Paul described as a 'philosophy', a term used for a wide range of religious and pseudo-religious teaching. Probably in mind were the sort of popular religious speculations which must often have been



proffered by soap-box 'philosophers' in the market place. Paul dismisses it as 'empty deceit', product of 'human tradition' and speculation about the cosmos, how it came about and functioned. The key for him was that such speculation ignored the key to understanding reality which was Christ (2:8).

PREACHING POINTS

What philosophies are a threat to Christianity today?

This key is summed up by Paul's repetition of the phrase 'in him'. It starts with the astonishing claim that 'in him' was encountered nothing less than the embodiment of 'the whole fullness of deity' (2:9). Even more astonishing, the Colossian Christians had been given to share in that fullness

'in him', the one who was the head of (inestimably superior to) every ruler and authority – that is, including any genuine cosmic powers that the Colossians might be attracted to (2:10).

PREACHING POINTS

Are Paul's regular uses of the phrases 'in Christ' and 'with Christ' helpful in your understanding of his teaching and practice of your faith?

The theology is rich. Circumcision, like baptism, had a deep spiritual significance. So although Paul was adamant in insisting that Gentile converts should not be circumcised, he did not hesitate to use the metaphor of circumcision both for the stripping away of fleshly desires and for the death of Christ (2:11). But his preferred metaphor is

that of dying with Christ, buried with him in baptism, and raised with him – an 'already' anticipation of the final climax of complete salvation (bodily resurrection) (2:12). Note how the 'with Christ' has come in to complement the 'in Christ'.

The range of metaphors becomes still richer: conversion as a being made alive, as well as receiving forgiveness of sins (2:13); Christ's saving act as an erasure of the legitimate charge against the sinner – 'nailed to the cross', a brilliant adaptation of the usual practice of nailing to the cross the charge for which the individual had been crucified (2:14); and the stripping off of the powers under which his incarnation set him, and the triumph over them, which his resurrection achieved (2:15). The metaphors do not fit easily together but express the rich variety and depth of Paul's and the readers' experience.

Small Group Resource

Week 2 (Colossians 1:24-2:15)

Meditating on Colossians

In this section of the letter, Paul reflects on his ministry and his hope for the Christians at Colossae (1:24 – 2:5), highlights the importance of growing in Christ (2:6-7), and shows the power of the cross over the rulers of this world (2:8-15).

A small group discussion could focus on the key themes that emerge in this passage, such as Paul's commitment to making the gospel known, the riches of the mystery of Christ, and being buried and raised to new life with Christ.

You could also help others to engage with this section of Colossians through a group meditation. While there are a variety of ways to meditate, one helpful approach was developed by the great Reformer Martin Luther. Luther encouraged every Christian to read and engage with the Bible, and described a way of praying with Scripture through a 'garland of four strands,' namely: instruction, thanksgiving, confession and prayer. Considering a biblical text with these four dimensions in mind can be a powerful way of entering into biblical meditation, either as an individual or as part of a group.

Approaching the text

Read Colossians 1:24-2:15 aloud twice. Make sure that everyone has a Bible or a copy of the text to read for themselves.

Invite members of the group to read and reflect on one of the smaller sections within this passage (1:24-2:5; 2:6-7; 2:8-15), focusing on the following questions:

- a) Teaching: what does this text teach me about God or my faith?
- b) Thanksgiving: what can I praise and thank God for in this passage?
- c) Confession: How can this passage lead me to confess and turn away from sin?
- d) Prayer: How can this passage guide me in my prayer now?

Spend some time together praying through each of these areas, allowing the reflections to shape your prayer.

Discuss in the wider group the different dimensions of the text that emerged. How did the passage speak more powerfully through considering it in this way?

Further Reading

Martin Luther described this approach to prayer in his *A Simple Way to Pray*. A helpful and accessible recent guide to the approach is Michael Parson's *Praying the Bible with Luther: A simple approach to everyday prayer* (Abingdon: BRF, 2017).



Week 3

Colossians 2:16-3:17



Professor James D. G. Dunn

Free from Condemnation (2:16-19)

Clearly what is imagined is a situation where the Colossian believers were being criticized for their conduct in respect of dietary rules and festival days (2:16). They were not observing the rules regarding clean and unclean foods (Lev. 11:1-23; Deut. 14:3-21) – the make-or-break issue at the time of the Maccabees (1 Macc. 1:62-63). This was one of the most crucial issues for earliest Christianity, and it is where decisive steps were taken by both Peter (Acts 10:1-11:18) and Paul (Gal. 2:1-14).

PREACHING POINTS

Paul was criticizing the Colossians for putting certain rituals and practices before their belief in Christ. Is that a danger for today's Christians?

Equally important in Jewish religious practice were 'sabbaths, new moons and feasts' (e.g. 1 Chron. 23:31; Isa. 1:13-14). So it is clear that the Colossian believers were being criticized for being only half-converts – believing in a Jewish Messiah, but holding back from full commitment to Judaism. Paul's response is emphatic. Such beliefs and practices were only foreshadowing what was to come, that is, the Christ (Col. 2:17; cf. Heb. 10:1).

Using the metaphor of a race, Paul envisages the local synagogue authorities disqualifying the Colossian believers. They were insisting on acts of humility, probably fasting. 'Worship of angels' is puzzling, perhaps suggesting particular beliefs and practices rooted in visions, but at some remove from (Jewish) religious traditions (Col.2:18). An alternative is to interpret the reference as joining with the angels in their worship.

2:19 is a vigorous variation of Paul's earlier vision of the church as the body of Christ (as in 1 Cor. 12, 14). Here the thought is of the body's complete dependence on the head (Christ) for its nourishment and growth. Clearly indicated is the interdependence of the members of the body and their mutual dependence on the head.

Free in Christ (2:20-23)

The critique of the Colossian 'philosophy' is rounded off by emphasizing what the Colossians had been rescued from. The appeal is the same as in 2:12, to that decisive event of baptism in which they identified themselves with Christ in his death, his death marking the end of their identification with the world to which Christ died. The 'elemental spirits/forces' could be 'the laws of nature', or more precisely, the rules and social conventions which order society, and to which we all conform. Hence the question: why do you live as though you still belonged to this world? (2:20).

The 'regulations' which are quoted are all to do with purity and food – a reminder that such rules governing ritual are seen by all religions as a means of maintaining harmony with the spiritual forces behind perceptible reality. Again it would appear that characteristically Jewish concerns are in view, particularly the distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean', raising issues which confronted Jesus, as in Mark 5:1-34 (2:21).

PREACHING POINTS

What are the 'elemental forces' which shape and order society today?

Following Jesus (Mark 7:7, Matt. 15:9) Paul alludes to the rebuke of Isaiah (Isa. 29:13):

honouring with lips, while the heart is far from God, worshipping by rote, parrot-like, giving permanence to what was never intended to be more than temporary (2:22). In 2:23 the text becomes difficult as a result of a sequence of unusual terms, probably drawn from the Colossian philosophy. The warning that 'appearance of wisdom', 'self-made religion', (pretend?) 'humility', and 'severe treatment of the body' are of no value in checking self-indulgence is a sobering warning against over-enthusiastic religion (2:23).

A NEW PATTERN OF LIFE (3:1 – 4:6)

Life with Christ (3:1-4)

The message of Jesus' death on the cross would not be gospel without the message of his resurrection – and of their sharing in both: 'buried with him' (2:20) and 'raised with Christ' (3:1). The completion of Christ's saving work was his exaltation to heaven, now 'seated at God's right hand', echoing Ps. 110:1, one of the OT passages most quoted in the NT. It is from here that the Colossians, listening to the letter being read, should draw their values and guiding principles. They should not follow the values and goals of contemporary society (Col. 3:2). For their old way of life and values had been left behind, and their whole point of living was bound up with Christ, 'hidden with Christ in God' (3:3). That challenge was far from easy, but the climax of what was to come would be their vindication. The sharing in his death and resurrection would climax in a sharing in his glory (3:4).

PREACHING POINTS

'Christ who is your life' (3:4): how well does that resonate with you and your relationships?



Living the New Life (3:5-17)

The exhortation to 'kill off those parts of you', habits of hand and mind, which tied them 'to the earth', is something of a surprise after the repeated reminder that the Colossian believers had already 'died' with Christ (2:12, 20; 3:3). The key is to recognize that the commitment of baptism is by no means the whole story. Salvation is a lifelong process, not a once-for-all act in midlife. The process involves saying a firm and repeated 'No!' to corrupting thoughts and habits such as impurity, evil desire and greed – greed as a form of idolatry because it projects acquisitiveness and personal satisfaction as objective goods (3:5). It is just such attitudes and actions which they used to prize, the destructive consequences of which Paul sees as the outworking of God's wrath (3:6-7; see more fully Rom. 1:18-32).

'But now', the 'but now' of conversion and baptism, a fundamental shift in ethical norms and character of conduct has taken

place. The metaphor of 'putting off' clothes is obvious imagery for transformed values and conduct (as in Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22). Here the 'vice-list' focuses on personal relationships within the Christian community, warning against the outbursts particularly of careless or malicious speech that can be so damaging to community relations (Col. 3:8-9). That may have been acceptable in the earlier life, 'but now' the old habits and practices ('the old man') have been 'stripped off', and a new suit of clothes, a 'new self', has been 'put on'. 'Renewed in knowledge', as God intended, reversing humanity's initial failure (Gen. 2:17; 3:5, 7) (Col. 3:9-10).

In that renewal Christ makes irrelevant all ethnic, cultural and social distinctions, even 'barbarians' and 'Scythians', widely regarded as repulsive savages. Christ embraces all (3:11).

The exhortation repeats the familiar 'put off' (3:9) and 'put on' (3:10, 12), again,

including 'humility' as a positive virtue. In bearing with one another, Christ is the model (3:13) and love the force which bonds (3:14). The peace of Christ can rule their hearts, as they function as the body of Christ (3:15). The brief description of worship in 3:16 is well worth considering, and comparing with contemporary experience. Not to be missed is the final exhortation: literally, '*everything, whatever* it is, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him' (3:17).

PREACHING POINTS

Does 3:1-17 still provide meaningful principles for daily living?

Small Group Resource

Week 3 (Colossians 2:16-3:17)

Spotting the Contrasts

In Colossians 2:16-23, Paul explains that those who follow the way of Christ need to avoid deception through 'philosophy and empty deceit' (2:18). As Dunn explains in the Bible Notes, the Colossian believers were being criticised for not following Jewish dietary rules and festivals. Paul draws a contrast between the 'shadow' of such regulations and the 'substance' that belongs to Christ. A further set of contrasts emerge in 3:1-17, where Paul focuses on the difference between the way of life found *in* Christ and the way of life *outside* of Christ.

One way to tackle this text in a group discussion is to focus explicitly on the different contrasts within this text – both between Paul's theology and the 'philosophy' he opposes, and between the new life and the old.

Approaching the text

Read through Colossians 2:16-3:17. Make sure everyone has the passage in front of them, either printed out or in the Bible.

Ask members of the group, individually or in pairs or small groups, to identify the contrasts Paul draws in this section of the letter. Focus particularly on two sets of contrasts; the contrasts between Paul's view and that of his opponents (2:16-23), and the contrast between the old way of life and the new way of life (3:1-17).

Draw together the observations from members of the group. You could do this through using flip-chart paper, with one page exploring the contrast between 'opponents' and 'Paul', and another page exploring the contrast between 'new life' and 'old life.'

Discuss what these contrasts tell us about Paul's vision of the gospel. How does life in the way of Christ today contrast with competing visions and values in wider society?

Further Reading

Many approaches to inductive Bible study note the importance of observing contrasts within biblical texts. For one example, see the brief discussion in David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), pp. 97-98.



Week 4

Colossians 3:18-4:18



Professor James D. G. Dunn

Household Rules (3:18-4:1)

Household rules are a characteristic feature of the later New Testament writings (cf. Eph. 5:22-6:9 and 1 Pet. 2:18-3:7), probably reflecting or based on codes of 'household management' that were widely followed. Because the earliest churches usually met in members' houses, it was important that such meetings were beyond suspicion. So such rules were important, not only for good order in Christian meetings, but also for the reputation which such meetings would attract.

It is important to note that the first to be addressed are wives, not women generally, and not husbands. Characteristic of the time, wives were regarded as subordinate to their husbands; in Roman law the 'father of the family' (*paterfamilias*) had absolute power over the other members of the family. Here however, we should note the Christian addition – 'as is fitting in the Lord' (3:18).

The husbands' corresponding duty is to love their wives, where the word 'love' is the distinctively Christian term (*agapan*) used particularly of Jesus' self-giving on the cross. Such love is never 'harsh' (3:19).

Children were technically the property of the father, and were in fact no better off than a slave (as Paul noted in Gal. 4:1-7). So it is unsurprising that the exhortation to children (3:20) is the same as the exhortation to slaves (3:22), except that obedience is called for in relation to both parents. The equivalent exhortation to the fathers is simply that they should not 'provoke' their children, a surprisingly negative summary of paternal responsibility (3:21).

It is also noteworthy that slaves are directly addressed, the assumption being that the

household slaves would be in the congregation addressed by Paul. The word used for their masters is the same as that used for Christ ('lord'); hence the qualification – 'your earthly masters'; their responsibility to earthly masters does not distract from their loyalty to Christ (3:22).

They are to perform their role wholeheartedly, including when no one is watching them. Their motivation: that they are doing it for the Lord (3:23). Their primary relation is not with their masters but with the Lord, and they can be assured that they are his heirs. Under Roman law slaves could not inherit anything, so Paul's reassurance was a reminder of their higher status in God's eyes (3:24). The assurance of God's impartiality – wrongdoers, whatever their status, will be paid back for the wrongs they have done (3:25) – must have been tremendously reassuring in a society where as many as 50 per cent were slaves.

Also notice the final counsel to masters, in effect reminding them that they too have obligations to their slaves. They were not mere chattels to be disposed of as their owners chose, but should be treated 'justly and fairly'. Even, or especially, hard-nosed masters should remember that before God they too were but slaves (4:1).

PREACHING POINTS

Do the 'household rules' still provide a good model for today?

Concluding exhortations (4:2-6)

Paul regularly rounds off his letters with a sequence of exhortations. Here in Colossians, his first request is that they should be persistent in prayer. They should keep alert, not in a spirit of fear or anxiety, but

with the confidence and assurance that their resources in Christ are more than equal to the potential challenges (4:2). Colossians is one of the most 'thankful' documents in the New Testament (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2).

Characteristic of Paul is the request that prayer should be for his missionary work. What he had in mind is well illustrated in Phil. 1:12-14. It is striking that he should see his imprisonment as an opportunity to share the gospel and to proclaim the 'mystery' whose unveiling was one of his primary responsibilities (1:25-27) (4:3-4).

It is notable that the final exhortation is directed to the Colossian believers' relations with their non-Christian neighbours and those they encountered at work and in the market place. The probably small group of believers in Colossae needed to be both circumspect in their dealings with others and to be ready to respond graciously when questions were raised about their own faith (4:5-6). The picture is clearly of a Christian group who did not shut themselves away from the world, but were thoroughly engaged in their community.

PREACHING POINTS

How would you characterize and illustrate speech 'seasoned with salt' (4:6)?

CONCLUSION (4:7-18)

Maintaining Communication (4:7-9)

Tychicus was one of Paul's closest associates, numbered behind only Timothy and Titus (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Tit. 3:12). More than 50 of Paul's close associates and 'fellow-workers' are mentioned in his letters,



at least 10 of them women. The warmth of the reference ('beloved brother', 'faithful servant', 'fellow slave in the Lord') should not be missed (4:7). Likewise the reason for his mission to bring news how Timothy and he were faring; the personal bonds were important (4:8).

The party being sent to Colossae included Onesimus, the principal subject of Paul's letter to Philemon (Phm. 10) – a letter well worth reading at this point. The (former?) runaway slave is also counted a 'faithful and beloved brother' (4:9).

Greetings (4:10-17)

As usual Paul signs off with a sequence of greetings. Aristarchus, from Thessalonica, described as a 'fellow worker' in Phm. 24, was a close companion in Paul's later journeys (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2) and now a 'fellow prisoner' (4:10). It is notable that Mark, the earlier 'failure' (Acts 15:38-39), was evidently redeemed later on (2 Tim. 4:11; Phm. 24) and possibly acted as a mediator between Paul and Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). The language suggests that relations

were still somewhat strained (4:10).

The reference to Jesus Justus reminds us that 'Jesus' (the Greek form of 'Joshua') was a common name among Jews. 'Those of the circumcision' may simply refer to Jews, or since the phrase is used elsewhere for Jews who were hostile to Paul's mission (Gal. 2:12; Tit. 1:10), Paul is possibly reminding the Colossians that there were several of his fellow Jews who supported his Gentile mission (4:11).

Epaphras was probably an evangelist of Colossae and the other cities of the Lycus valley (1:7-8; 4:13), who now shared Paul's imprisonment (Phm. 23). His prayers for the Colossians were notably that they should 'stand mature' and determined to do what God wills (4:12). The image of his prayers as a struggle ('wrestling') should not be missed. For more on Laodicea see Rev. 3:14-22.

Luke 'the beloved physician' was a companion to Paul on his missionary journeys, a 'fellow worker' (Phm. 24), and Paul's final companion (2 Tim. 4:11). Demas was later

regarded as a deserter, 'in love with this present world' (2 Tim. 4:10) (4:14). As was characteristic for the first two centuries, churches met in homes, where the householder, in this case Nympha, would be the congregation's leader (4:15).

The exchange of letters to different churches helps explain how the influence of Paul's letters must have spread (4:16). Sadly, we do not know what the 'ministry' or 'act of service' was with which Archippus had been commissioned (4:17; cf. Phm. 2).

PREACHING POINTS

Of those greeted and greeting, who do you most identify with?

A personal greeting (4:18)

The brevity of the final note (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21-24; Gal. 6:11-18) and the plea to 'Remember my chains' suggests that Paul's imprisonment was becoming more severe.

Small Group Resource

Week 4 (Colossians 3:18-4:18)

The Gospel at Home

In Colossians 3:18-4:18, Paul instructs Christians about how their faith impacts life within the home (3:18-4:1), offers some concluding exhortations (4:2-6), and ends with a series of greetings (4:7-18).

Perhaps the most striking feature of this section is Paul's instructions about living out the faith at home, the so-called 'household code' of Colossians. As Dunn notes, many writers in the ancient world gave such instructions about living within the home, but Paul is distinctive in the way that he calls each person within the home to live 'for the Lord.'

In discussing this section of the letter, it might be helpful to lead into a discussion of the kind of homes and communities that members of the small group live in today – whether in family homes, alone in a flat, in a student community, or anywhere else. In this way, a link between the biblical text and today can be forged; how might Paul's words about first-century domestic life apply to our own very different context?

Approaching the text

Read together through Colossians 3:18-4:18.

Discuss key questions about the household code:

- Which members of the household does Paul address?
- How does Paul encourage them to behave?
- How do Paul's instructions here relate to the surrounding passages, 3:1-16 and 4:2-6?

Explore the current 'household arrangements' of members of the small group. What are the challenges that each person faces? How do they live out their faith in that context?

Further Reading

The household can helpfully be seen as part of our 'frontline', the everyday life that we live outside the church alongside others. For a helpful discussion of 'faith on the frontline', see Mark Greene, *Fruitfulness on the Frontline. Making a difference where you are* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2014).



Bible Month Resources for Children and Young People



If you're working with children and young people you may find it useful to share some background to this book of the Bible before you embark on exploring it further. It helps to put scripture in context and helps them to imagine the time, place and people who received this letter. The book of Colossians was written by Paul to new Christians living in a place called Colossae just a few decades after Jesus died. Faith was new to this group of people but because Paul was in prison, he wasn't able to go and visit them in person. He wanted to challenge their ideas and some of the teaching they had heard. They'd got the wrong idea! These people in Colossae were a little bit confused about what faith really was and how to be church (moving from 'doing church' to 'being church') in their community. So Paul wants to set them straight, clear up some confusion and try to be clear on what it is to be a Christian and follow Jesus. He emphasises that Jesus is the very image of God and rules over all things.

Ways in...

Some ideas to explore the background to the letter:

- **Find Colossae on a map** – Where is it today? There are lots of Bible apps that include Maps: try *Bible Map* on Apple Apps Plus
- **Read some letters together** – Invite children and young people to bring one in from home if possible – who is it from? What does it say? How does it start and end?
- **Consider writing letters to others who the church knows** – Perhaps those on mission in other countries or family members living in another place. The letter could be images, words or both – you could be creative in making it!
- Each child or young person to **write a letter to the church about what being church means to them** that can be read out in a service or let them choose a topic that they want to talk to the church about.
- **Hand out Bibles** – Can we find the letter?



Chapter 1

So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honour and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. (Extract from v 9-14, *New Living Translation (NLT)*)

Children and Young People

Ways in...

Quick Question Session

- **Understanding who God is and how he wants us to live.** How does being a Christian make a difference to how we respond and live our lives each day? Or does it? Explore who do they know is a Christian and how do they know they are? (v9-14)

Activities Age 8-18 years

- **Who and what are the big influences on us** - Use wallpaper or lining paper and draw an outline of a young person. Ask the group to write on the outside the names of people who influence them. E.g. TV, films, music, YouTubers, school. Then ask them to write outside the figure in a different colour pen how are they influenced and what does this influence look like? On the outside of the figure write 'What ways does God influence them?'
- Further questions to explore include: How do our friends want us to live? How do our parents/families want us to live? How does media/social media want us to live? How does God want us to live? Recognising that God equips us to live lives of freedom where we and others can grow.
- Or you can use a **continuum line** - The group stand and visualise an imaginary line across the room. One end of the line is 'agree' and the other 'disagree' and the children and young people select themselves where they stand. They can change where they stand at any time during the conversation. The question is: 'God influences me a lot?' Agree/disagree. Ask the children and young people at the 'agree' end/'disagree' end or in the middle: why have they chosen to stand where they are. This activity can also be used in an intergenerational context. Or you can use Yes, No or Maybe and members of the group choose to stand by one of the answers.
- **Wisdom, strength, patience, joy, resilience** - Write each one these words out on a separate large piece of paper. Ask the group to draw or write their understanding of these words or a definition of these words on the sheets of paper. Think and write names of who they know has these qualities. When did we last notice them in ourselves?
- Select modern-day dilemmas for young people to discuss and how they could affect someone's ability to exhibit wisdom, strength, patience, joy or resilience. Some examples could be: bullying, fighting, drops litter, writes a mean comment on a social media post.
- **Write words on a ball** - Pass the ball around the group and when the facilitator says 'stop' the holder makes up a story using the first word they see.

Intergenerational Idea

God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

(Extract from v25-28, New Living Translation (NLT))

God knew us from the very beginning. But kept one gift back as He got to know us and we got to know God. When Christ was born, He chose to reveal this gift to us.

- **Read v27 - what is this gift?** Christ is in us! In our hearts and minds: how we think and how we feel. How we make choices every day. Not that this makes us instantly perfect in every way – God is at work with us and alongside us to work towards being the best person we can.
- **Share about some famous Christians** and tell the story of their lives. Some examples could be: Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Mary Berry, Claudia Fragapane, Bear Grylls or Daniel Sturridge. Put their names on cards and give some info on who they are on back of card. Which ones are Christians and why? Pick them and read, follow by looking at the others. What do they have in common? Speak about faith, who they are and how it impacts their daily life.
- Get into pairs and **write descriptions for each other**. Where do you see God in the other person?
- If you were to say **three things about being a Christian** to someone who's never heard about God, what would they be?
- **Yes, no, maybe questions:** I am confident to talk openly about my faith and God; I get embarrassed talking about God; I don't really know what to say about God; I wonder what people will think of me; Talking about God is important to me. Use this discussion to explore some of the barriers to talking about God and faith - let those in your group encourage each other and grow in confidence.



Chapter 2

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.
(Extract from v6-7, New Living Translation (NLT))

Children and Young People

- **Root Search** – Take the group for a short stroll near to where you meet. Ensure you get all the permissions you need before going out as well as the other safety checks required. A local park or play area is ideal. Play 'Go Find' in pairs either by calling out the different things or providing a list or place for them to record their responses. Ideas for the 'Go Find' list are: something that has roots that go a long way down; something that has roots near the surface; something you can see the roots of; something that doesn't have roots. Afterwards share what they found and discuss why roots are important.
- The idea of our roots growing down into Jesus might seem a strange image. **Talk about how we might do this** – we don't actually have to plant ourselves in the ground!

Intergenerational Idea

- **Plant runner beans or sunflower seeds together** by providing pots and compost to put them in. Encourage different ages to work together. Talk about what we need to do to care for them and how could we best do this as a church family? Draw parallels with how we put our roots down into Jesus. Wonder together about how might God 'water' us or 'shine sunlight' into our lives?
- As the plants grow return to them occasionally to check progress and see if they need planting out or staking up as they grow taller. **Discuss that sometimes in life we need God to 'prop us up' a bit like the plants, maybe when life is hard.** Invite some people of different ages to come and share if they've had an experience like this and how it was for them to know God in the middle of it. It would be worth considering asking them to prepare their short testimony in advance.

So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!?" Such rules are mere human teachings. (Extract from v20-22, New Living Translation (NLT))

Children and Young People

- **Group Rules** - Ask the children and young people to write down three helpful rules for this group. If they'd prefer to draw them provide some felt tip pens and large sheets of paper. Give the group time to look at all the suggestions. Ask the group to see if they can agree on three for the whole group to abide by. Let there be some discussion and debate about which ones they prefer. Would there be any rules we wouldn't like?
- **Making Pizza** - Buy the ingredients to make pizzas (you could get ready made bases and just add toppings). Tell the group that there are rules before starting the activity and read out a list of your own making. Include some sensible ones and others which are ridiculous! E.g. Wash your hands before touching the food; balance on one leg whilst grating cheese etc. Discuss with the group whether they think the rules make sense or why not. Reflect on the need for there to be rules, but sometimes they can get in the way especially when we're trying to be Christians.
- **Silly or Sensible Rules** - Create a list of ten rules for being a Christian. Include a range of things e.g. read your Bible for exactly 17.5 minutes every day; pray with your eyes shut; thank God when you notice something wonderful He's made. Explain there's a continuum line with 'silly' at one end and 'sensible' at the other. As you read the rules ask them to stand somewhere on the line and give time for them to share their reasoning about why they stood there. Ask if it's helpful to have rules when you're a Christian. Invite the group to adapt the rules and write a new list or consider whether any are needed at all!

Intergenerational Idea

Paul talks here of the competing influences in life. The messages we receive from a range of different places and people can all have an impact on us and change the way we think or view things.

- Ask the group to spend a few minutes speaking with the person next to them about **who or what influences them the most?** When the time is up ask for their thoughts and recognise the difference in answers. For younger people social media is probably a major influence whereas for those a few generations older it may be newspapers and friends.
- **Do a quickfire influencers quiz** – hold up images of different well known people and ask those in the group to stand or put their hand up if the famous face is a big influence on them. Suggestions for these are: Joe Sugg (YouTuber), Mary Berry, Barack Obama, Harry Kane.... etc. Alternatively you could include these on a PowerPoint or on a handout sheet to look at. Ask the question: 'How do they influence us?' and 'Did anyone influence people of all ages?'



Chapter 3

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honour at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth....So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you....Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. (Extract from v1-10, New Living Translation (NLT))

Children and Young People

- **Reading the passage** - You may wish to read the fuller passage with young people that goes onto v17. With children consider reading from the Good News Bible version v8-10 then 12 to 13.
- **I Love to Wear** - Talk about if anyone in the group has a favourite item of clothing. What is it? Why do they like it? How do they feel when they put it on?
- **The Dirty Coat** - Bring a filthy, worn coat to the group and ask if anyone is brave enough to put it on! You could use an old coat and ask the group to make it dirty before doing this. Explain that this coat is similar to all the things Paul talks about in the letter. How might those things cause harm to us or others? Wonder together whether it might ever be okay to be angry or passionate for instance? What might these things look like if they were to be items of clothing we put on? You might want to post these as questions around the room to move from one to the next and invite older children and young people to discuss them in small groups together.

Intergenerational Idea

- **Get Dressed!** - Have a race to see who can put the most items of clothing on in one minute. Provide lots of different items and invite two or three people to take part, a mixture of different ages might make it more engaging. You might want to see who can then take them off the quickest! Explain how this is an image of what Paul is describing (not the speed of course) – putting on and taking off clothing but instead he's talking about qualities and our behaviour.
- Give differently aged small groups of three or four some paper (a mix of wrapping paper, wallpaper, newspaper) and invite them to **make an item of clothing for someone in the group**. Provide sellotape or glue too. Explain that it represents something mentioned in the passage that we are to put on, you might want to give each group a different one. What might a 'Coat of Compassion' look like or a 'Hat of Humility'? Have a fashion show once everyone's completed and let them explain their thinking and ideas.
- **Old self, new self** (v 1-17) - Explore whether there are times when it's okay to be angry? Passionate? Are they always bad traits? How can we learn to understand those feelings and what causes them? Find some example stories of where people were angry or passionate about something in a good way and in a not so good way. Compare and contrast then ask the group to choose the positive examples and explain why. Use film clips, YouTube, magazines or newspapers to source stories.



Chapter 4

Ways in...

Talking to God and others:

What is prayer/ how do you talk to God? How do we take care of others in what we say, How do you describe or talk about God (v 2-6)

Children and Young People or Intergenerational

- **Ask the group questions** - What does the word 'prayer' mean? What are the different ways that we can pray? Explore prayer as *the act of communicating with God*.
- **Try a selection of different prayer activities** - be creative and set up five prayer stations for the group to explore based around the theme 'Talking to God'. For ideas look at 'Prayer Spaces in Schools. (www.prayerspacesinschools.com) What are the different ways that can be used to spend time in God's presence in conversation?
- **How are we taking care with our words towards others** - Write positive phrases on a ball in permanent marker: e.g. *Thank you to ___ for...; You are good at...; I like this about you...; The kindest person I know is...* Then stand in a circle and pass the ball across the circle in a random way ensuring everyone has a chance to catch the ball. The person with the ball reads out one of the phrases and chooses someone in the circle to direct the phrase at.
- Or just pass the ball and each time someone throws the ball they **say something kind and generous about the person catching the ball**.
- **Yes, no, maybe or not sure** – label a corner of the room yes and another corner no. etc. Then ask questions about what God is like e.g. I think God is all-powerful?; I think God is kind?; I think that God is a father?; I think that God gets angry? Let the group choose where they stand and open up conversation by asking them why they chose to stand where they are.

Conclusion

'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.' (Colossians 2:6-7)

If you have completed Bible Month in your church or circuit, we hope that it has been an encouraging and stimulating month for you. We'd love to get your feedback on the month, so please do get in touch with us at lwptoffice@lwpt.org.uk.

Look out for Bible Month 2020, on the book of Ruth.

Gospel Readings

For churches that wish to complement the readings from Colossians with a gospel reading, the following passages can be used.

Week	Colossians	Gospel
1	1:1-23	Luke 1:67-79
2	1:24-2:15	Luke 9:28-36
3	2:16-3:17	Luke 12:22-34
4	3:18-4:18	Luke 17:1-10

Further Reading

As well as exploring Colossians through the Bible Notes, it can be helpful to read and reflect on commentaries and studies, such as the following:



Introductory: Derek Tidball, *Colossians and Philemon*. Really Useful Guides. Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2018.

Intermediate: Charles H. Talbert *Ephesians and Colossians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007.

Advanced: James D. G. Dunn *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

Going Further

We encourage churches that have taken part in a Bible Month to consider ways in which they might continue to engage with Scripture beyond the month. Helpful resources include:

The Bible Course: an 8-session course that can help participants explore the 'big picture' of the Bible. (www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-course)

The Community Bible Experience: a great tool for reading the Bible together in community. (www.biblicaeurope.com/our-work/community-bible-experience/introduction)

Holy Habits: Biblical Teaching: this 'missional discipleship' resource for churches explores the 'holy habit' of biblical teaching. (www.brfoonline.org.uk/holy-habits)

Navigate: five interactive sessions designed to help young people explore and engage with the Bible. (Free to download at www.methodist.org.uk/navigate) For further resources, visit www.preachweb.org/biblemonth

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